FWIS 163: Medical Humanities
MWF 1:00-1:50 (section 01)
MWF 2:00-2:50 (section 02)
Martel 101

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Welcome to FWIS 163! This syllabus will try to answer the questions you may have about this course, now and throughout the semester. If you want to maximize your learning during our time together, you'll want to be very familiar with this document. If you have a question about the class as the semester progresses, *always check the syllabus first*. And, of course, feel free at any point to ask me any questions that aren't answered here. Let's get started with the questions and answers…

1. Why is this course called "Medical Humanities"? What does that even mean? Do I need any scientific knowledge to do well in the course? Is this class only for pre-meds?

FWIS 163 focuses on how the humanities—and particularly literature—can help us understand the wide spectrum of experiences that might be called "medical": birth and death, health and illness, giving or receiving care. We'll also use the *methods* of the humanities (argument and debate supported by textual analysis, close reading, etc.) to examine the complexity of these experiences, the ways in which illness often involves than physical symptoms and practicing medicine often involves more than trying to alleviate those symptoms with biomedical knowledge and technical expertise. We'll also use medical and illness narratives to talk about more universal questions about empathy, mortality, and what makes life meaningful. The issues we discuss this semester will be important for anyone who wants to practice medicine one day, but you certainly don't have to be a pre-med or have any special prior knowledge to find value and interest in the course. As a discipline, the humanities explore what it means to be human, and this course will give you a chance to read and interpret some powerful works of memoir, fiction, film, and drama as we examine that question through the particular lens of medicine.

2. What exactly should we learn about this course topic by the end of the semester? What should we be able to do with that knowledge?

Here's what you should be able to do by the end of the semester with the knowledge you'll gain about our course topic (and which you'll demonstrate through the course's major writing assignments):

- Analyze medical and illness narratives to articulate and explain the personal and individual aspects of illness, the ways an ill person's suffering can extend beyond physical symptoms, and the challenges and complexities of offering competent, empathetic care.
- Delineate the differences between pain and suffering; disease and illness; and curing and healing.
- Recognize cultural assumptions about illness and the practice of medicine and decipher the ways in which a literary or cultural text challenges, complicates, or reinforces these assumptions.
- Read and interpret medical narratives through a theoretical lens to make a larger argument about illness or the practice of medicine.

- Demonstrate an understanding of how work in the medical humanities can influence medical education, the practice of medicine, and the lives of the ill.

3. What about the "FWIS" part of this class? What does that mean? Will we be writing a lot in this class? What's the point of FWIS, anyway?

This is a first-year writing intensive seminar, so yes: we will be writing a lot. You'll be doing frequent low-stakes (i.e. ungraded or completion grade) writing, in and out of class, and you'll be writing and revising a short graded summary and three longer graded essays. All of this writing work towards the overall goal of this course, which is the same goal of all FWIS courses: to help you develop and improve your reading, writing and oral communication skills, and particularly the specific skills you need to communicate effectively in academic life. If you think of yourself as a "bad" writer, don't worry: this course will meet you where you are and try to offer you plenty of tools to help you improve. If you already think of yourself as a very strong writer, this course will probably offer you the gift of humility by reminding you that *every* piece of writing always has room for improvement. You probably recognize that communication in general is an essential part of success in any academic field, any job, and pretty much in all aspects of our lives, and that's ultimately why this course matters: it offers you a chance to become a more effective communicator.

With all of this in mind, the FWIS program has some major objectives that we want every course, and every student, to accomplish. You might want to think of these as "process" goals, since most of these goals are focused on the various processes we can use to be successful academic writers, readers, and communicators. By the end of the semester, everyone in this course should:

I. Enhance their understanding of the central place of writing and communication in the learning process and in academic life.
II. Learn strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, and responding to college-level readings.
III. Improve their ability to communicate correctly and effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose.
IV. Become comfortable with writing as a process and learn strategies—for instance, prewriting, outlining, and revision—for working through that process.
V. Learn appropriate use of the work of others and, where necessary, specific practices of citation.
VI. Learn to articulate oral arguments and to respond productively to arguments of others in formal presentations and in class discussion.

Remember these goals. Keep them in mind throughout the semester. Every day of class and all of the work you do for this course is designed to help you achieve these goals.

4. But what constitutes "good" writing in this course? What does an "A" paper look like?

Beyond the process goals, we'll also have some goals that are focused on the actual writing you produce, particularly for the major writing assignments you'll complete in the course. These goals describe what you should aim for in every graded piece of writing you submit this semester. I call them the **7 C's** that describe effective academic writing:

- **Clear**
- **Compelling**
- **Convincing**
- **Fully contextualized**

- **Cohesive and coherent**
- **Cites others appropriately**

We'll spend quite a bit of time exploring what each of these criteria means and what exactly constitutes each one. But for now, if you're wondering what constitutes excellent writing in this course (and beyond this course), the kind of writing that will earn you an A on the graded writing assignments, know this: excellent academic writing is clear, compelling, convincing, fully contextualized, cohesive and coherent, and cites others appropriately.

5. What are *the major assignments? And what else contributes to our grade?*

Here's how I'll assess whether you've mastered all of the learning goals above and what percentage of your overall grade each assignment or category counts for:

Academic summary (15%) – During the second week of the semester, you'll read an academic article related to one of the key concepts in our course and then complete a formal summary of the article that's no longer than a page double-spaced. This assignment will help you develop your academic reading skills, as well as the key academic ability of summarizing, synthesizing, and contextualizing complex arguments in clear, effective language.

Essay #1: Close reading (25%) – At the beginning of October, you'll submit the final draft of a 4-6 page literary analysis essay in which you'll offer a close reading of a medical-themed short story, offering an argument that challenges or complicates a cultural assumption about empathy, illness, and/or the practice of medicine. This assignment will help you develop your ability to read and closely analyze a text, while also developing your critical thinking and your ability to make a clear, compelling, effective argument supported with textual evidence.

Essay #2: Lens/research paper (30%) – In November, you'll submit the final draft of a 6-10 page paper that analyzes Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Kurosawa's *Ikiru*, and/or Edson's *Wit*, incorporating scholarly sources and a theoretical lens to develop an argument that answers an intriguing question or challenges a widely-held assumption about illness, mortality, and the practice of medicine. This assignment will offer you the chance to further develop and demonstrate your mastery of nearly all of the course goals.

Essay #3: Personal essay (15%) - At the end of the semester, you'll submit the final draft of a 4+ page personal essay related to one of the concepts you were introduced to this semester. This assignment will help you further develop your ability to write clear, compelling prose, while developing your ability to analyze and critically examine an experience related to our course topic.

Reading Responses and Process Work (10%) - Since a major part of this course will be emphasizing the writing process as a whole, from pre-writing to revision, you'll be submitting your pre-writing, rough drafts, and peer review work leading up to the final draft. This process work will be graded for a completion (i.e. you get a 100 if you complete the assignment).

Another part of the process will be reflecting on both the readings we do in class and on your own work. You'll submit online reading responses for almost every reading assignment, as well as in-class reflections after completing the final draft of each writing assignment. These will both be graded for completion as well. Late process work and reading responses will receive a 50; missing process work and reading responses will receive a zero. All of this work will be submitted on Canvas, for rough drafts and pre-writing in the Assignments section and for reading responses in the Discussion section.

Participation and presentations (5%) - During each unit of the course, time permitting, you'll do one brief (usually 2-3 minutes) presentation, either solo or as part of a group. The main purpose of these presentations will be to increase your comfort-level speaking in front of an audience, as well as to help you become more reflective about what constitutes an effective oral presentation and more reflective about how you can be an effective presenter yourself. You will be evaluated through the self-reflections you complete after each presentation.

Beyond formal presentations, we'll be spending much of the semester learning through informal discussion. You'll learn more and help your classmates learn more when you thoughtfully and attentively participate during class. This doesn't just mean talking a lot in class discussions (and in fact, sometimes it means the opposite). It means actually listening to your professor and your peers, rather than pretending to listen; it means thoughtfully participating and staying on topic in small group or partner discussions; it means working thoughtfully and without distractions (i.e. looking at your phone or laptop, etc.) on whatever task we might be doing in class that day, including the email reflections I will periodically ask you to write during class; it means asking questions to help draw your peers' out on some topic. And finally, it means learning how to disagree with your peers in a kind, respectful, thoughtful way. We'll learn from our disagreements with each other—including your disagreements with me—but we have to make sure that in the process of disagreement we never forget to be polite, empathetic, and willing to give up the last word.

Your overall course grade at the end of the semester will be determined by this scale:

100-98 = A+	89-88 = B+	79-78 = C+	69-60 = D
97-93 = A	97-83 = B	77-73 = C	59-0 = F
92-90 = A-	82-80 = B-	72-70 = C-	

Note: I round up on .5 or higher.

6. Do you offer extra credit?

In various ways, yes. You will be turning in a lot of daily process work this semester, from reading responses to rough drafts. As I mentioned, missing any of these assignments will result in a zero. But I also understand that during a busy semester you might not be able to turn in every single daily assignment, so I'll occasionally offer bonus assignments. Completing the bonus assignment will replace one late or missing process work/reading response assignment.

The best way to raise your grade, however, isn't strictly extra credit: **You can revise any or all of your graded writing assignments for up to 3 more points on each assignment**. **These optional revisions will be due on the last day of finals, along with a 2 page reflection essay.** The reflection essay will not be graded, but you will not receive extra revision points without submitting it. Everyone is required to submit this reflection and submit at least one revision, though you are welcome to revise all of your work if you want. (If someone fails to revise at least one paper, I'll deduct three points from their research paper grade.) Save your graded work throughout the semester, so you'll be ready to revise it at the end.

7. Can we meet with you outside of class to get help on our papers or to discuss our grades?

Of course. Even though it requires us both to take time out of our hectic schedules, meeting with me one-on-one is one of the best ways to learn and improve your work during the course of the semester. Before a final draft is due, I'll usually offer optional meetings, usually lasting around

20 minutes, where I'll read a portion of your latest draft and discuss it with you. For these meetings, you should bring a printed-out version of your draft. (It's difficult for me to comment on a draft I read on a laptop or tablet.) After I grade the final draft, I'll also usually offer optional meetings where I'll return your graded paper and we can discuss it individually, to help you have a clear idea of how you could revise it for the final optional revision. All of these meetings will take place at Brochstein Pavilion (i.e. the big glass coffee shop near the library), and you'll be able to sign up for them on Canvas.

8. Where else can I get help on my writing or presentations this semester outside of class?

You'll be required to do peer reviews outside of class, where you meet with students to read and constructively comment on each other's work. I'll give you more details about that in class. **But if you want more help from a trained writing consultant, then I strongly suggest you make an appointment with the Center for Academic and Professional Communication (CAPC)**. Located on the second floor of Fondren Library, the Center offers individual appointments where you can meet with a helpful peer consultant who can give you feedback about your paper's argument, structure, and other key elements. Note, though, that they are *not* editors or proofreaders. Don't go there expecting them to "fix your grammar mistakes." But they can, for example, offer suggestions about patterns they see in your sentence structure or the coherence of your argument. And they also offer individual feedback on oral presentations! You can make an appointment at the Center's website: capc.rice.edu.

9. What if I turn in a graded writing assignment late?

If you ask me well in advance (i.e. not the night before), I'm usually okay with granting extensions on graded writing assignments, though NOT rough drafts, as long as you also keep up with the work we're doing in class now that we've moved on. If you submit a paper late, you'll be deducted one letter grade. Still, turning something in late is obviously better than not turning it in at all.

10. If I want to ask about an extension (or any other questions), is it better to ask in person or via email?

It's better to ask me questions in person, before or during class or during an optional meeting. Email means more work for me and a less-immediate response for you. If it's personal or otherwise necessary, of course, I'm fine with you asking me questions via email. (Even if you email me, though, you might want to follow-up by mentioning it before or after class.) You can also try to catch me on my office phone if you have a pressing question: (713) 343-4498. And if you do email or call me, don't forget to use basic etiquette. Don't let your email look like a text to a friend. Don't call me and just ask a question without telling me who's calling (and throw in a polite "How are you doing, Professor Nixon?" while you're at it).

11. *I heard FWIS has a different policy regarding the Honor Code than other classes. Is that true?*

Yes and no. It's true that of the stated purposes of FWIS is to help new students understand the Rice Honor Code and, more explicitly, to teach students the rules of paraphrasing and scholarly attribution, and the appropriate uses of different types of evidence. Accordingly, FWIS instructors "take an educational approach" to transgressions of these rules and respond to errors in these areas as issues for grading and opportunities to correct errors, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. Thus, if you fail to appropriately cite a source or use someone else's

work in a questionable way, I might use it as a learning moment for you, though it still may affect your grade on that assignment (even to the point of receiving an F), but I wouldn't choose to make it an Honor Code violation.

At the same time, all FWIS instructors retain the authority to treat instances of repeat or *egregious* violations as matters for the attention of the Rice Honor Council. In this course, students are expected to do the *actual writing of their assignments on their own*, with no outside help from anyone else. However, students are strongly encouraged (and will sometimes be required) to collaborate on all other aspects of their coursework; including discussing assignments, reading each other's work, and making suggestions for editing and revision. In other words, your friends, your professor, and the CWOVC can all provide feedback on your work, but no one else should be telling you the exact words (or punctuation) to use or the exact choices to make. You're the writer. And you shouldn't be using a published writer's exact words or ideas without attribution, either. That's plagiarism.

12. What do I need to do if I have a documented disability?

Any student seeking academic adjustments or accommodations for a disability should speak to me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Additionally, students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center if they haven't already done so. And more generally, if there's anything I can do to help the classroom or learning experience for anyone in the class, please let me know.

13. Who can I talk to if I'm feeling really stressed or anxious at any point during the semester?

College can be stressful. If, for any reason at any point, you begin to feel that your stress level is affecting your personal well-being or mental health, and you'd like to talk to a a professional counselor, let me know and I'd be happy to help you get in touch with someone from Rice's Wellbeing or Counseling Center. You can also contact them directly through their websites. Here's the website for the Rice Counseling Center: https://wellbeing.rice.edu/counseling-center/contact-us (Look for the "contact us" or "set up an appointment" pages).

14. You haven't told us what books we need to buy for this class. Do we need to buy any books?

You do need to buy a few books:

- *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, Leo Tolstoy, translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Vintage Classics—**make sure you get this translation**)
- *Wit: A Play*, Margaret Edson (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux)

Most of your course readings, however, will be included in a course packet that I will be giving you near the end of the first week of class. This course packet will allow you to keep your course readings together in one place, in case you want to review them and have a keepsake from this course to look back on later and remember some of the texts and issues we've discussed. More importantly, though, research suggests that all of us are able to do more effective and meaningful "deep reading" when we're reading on a printed page, without the distractions of our digital devices. To do well in this course, you should write all over the course readings. Make marginal notes! Underline key passages! You'll be better prepared for discussion and your writing assignments if you do.

By the way, there may be a few additional readings that I'll print out for you or post on Canvas; I'll let you know if that's the case.
15. What are we doing each day in class? What's due and when?

Here's what you need to do BEFORE class on each of these days (not counting today, since you're already here). I reserve the right to rearrange this schedule later, if necessary, though I'll be sure to let you know if I do.

I. THE MEDICAL HUMANITIES: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY?

Wednesday, August 22 - Read Jane Macnaughton's "Medical humanities' challenge to medicine" and submit diagnostic summary on Canvas

Friday, August 24 - Read the introduction and first chapter of Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say/I Say* and submit Reading Response

Monday, August 27 - Read Eric Cassell's "The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine" and submit Reading Response

Wednesday, August 29 – Read William Zinsser's "Simplicity" from *On Writing Well* and submit Reading Response

Friday, August 31 – Read Messinger and Chin-Yee's "I and Thou: Learning the 'Human' Side of Medicine" from *Medical Humanities* and submit graded summary

II. DOCTORS AND PATIENTS IN LITERATURE: THE COMPLICATIONS AND CONSOLATIONS OF EMPATHY

Monday, September 3 - Labor Day (no class)

Wednesday, September 5 – Read Chekhov's "Gooseberries" and submit RR; discuss group presentations at the end of class

Friday, September 7 – Read Hemingway's "Indian Camp" and submit RR; group presentation at the beginning of class

Monday, September 10 - Read Saunders's "Tenth of December" and submit RR; group presentation at the beginning of class

Wednesday, September 12 - Read Diaz's "The Pura Principle" and submit RR; group presentation at the beginning of class

Friday, September 14 - Read Munro's "Night" and submit RR; group presentation at the beginning of class

Monday, September 17 - Read Danticat's "Water Child" and submit RR; group presentation at the beginning of class

Wednesday, September 19 - Read Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" and submit RR; group presentation at the beginning of class

Friday, September 21 - Read Trimble's "Getting Launched" and submit freewriting/evidence; during class, read Barthelme's "The School" and discuss structure of Essay #1

Monday, September 24 - Read Lamott's "Perfectionism" and "Shitty Rough Drafts" and submit rough draft of Essay #1; during class, discuss title and intro paragraph

Wednesday, September 26 - No homework; during class, discuss topic sentences and evidence/quoting/citing

Friday, September 28 - No homework; during class, discuss analysis and conclusion paragraphs

Monday, October 1 - Submit peer review for Essay #1; during class, discuss what makes sentences clear, convincing, and compelling

Wednesday, October 3 - During class, discuss final editing tips

Friday, October 5 - Submit final draft of Essay #1

III. MORTALITY AND MEANING IN LITERATURE, DRAMA, AND FILM

Monday, October 8 – No class; autumn recess

Wednesday, October 10 - Read the first four sections of Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and submit RR

Friday, October 12 – Finish *Ivan Ilyich* and submit RR

Monday, October 15 - Watch Kurosawa's *Ikiru* and submit RR

Wednesday, October 17 - Read Edson's *Wit* and submit RR

Friday, October 19 - No homework; during class, discuss essay #2 task and look at scholarly sources related to our texts

Monday, October 22- Research day

Wednesday, October 24 - Presentations

Friday, October 26 - Submit evidence for research paper

Monday, October 29 - Read excerpt from McPhee's "Draft No. 4" and submit rough draft of Essay #2; during class, discuss outlining after the first draft

Wednesday, October 31 - Revise intro and submit in Discussion section

Friday, November 2 - Revise body paragraphs and submit in Discussion section; during class, discuss Graff and Birkenstein's "naysayer" and "don't get me wrong" moves

Monday, November 5 - Submit peer review of Essay #2; during class, discuss example paper

Wednesday, November 7 - No homework; during class, discuss editing tips for research paper

Friday, November 9 - No homework; during class, discuss attribution, citation, and plagiarism

Monday, November 12 - Submit final draft of Essay #2

IV. THE PERSONAL ESSAY: NARRATIVE AND REFLECTION

Wednesday, November 14 - Read Jamison's "The Empathy Exams"

Friday, November 16 - Read Saunders's "Thank You, Esther Forbes" and Sullivan's "Feet in Smoke"; during class, brainstorm about ideas for Essay #3

Monday, November 19 - Submit rough draft of Essay #3; during class, read excerpt from Lopate's *To Show and To Tell*

Wednesday, November 21 - No class; Thanksgiving holiday

Friday, November 23 - No class; Thanksgiving holiday

Monday, November 26 - No homework; discuss revision techniques for the personal essay

Wednesday, November 28 - No homework; discuss editing techniques for the personal essay

Friday, November 30 - Submit final draft of Essay #3

Wednesday December 12 (by noon) - Submit folder with at least one essay revision and 2+ page reflection essay